
Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Chine-Taiwan: la guerre est-elle concevable?* (China and Taiwan: Is war conceivable?)

Paris, Economica, 2003, 470 p.

Jean-Vincent Brisset



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/830>
ISSN : 1996-4617

Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 juillet 2004
ISSN : 2070-3449

Référence électronique

Jean-Vincent Brisset, « Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Chine-Taiwan: la guerre est-elle concevable?* (China and Taiwan: Is war conceivable?) », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 54 | July- August 2004, mis en ligne le 25 avril 2007, consulté le 28 octobre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/830>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 28 octobre 2019.

© All rights reserved

Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Chine-Taiwan: la guerre est-elle concevable?* (China and Taiwan: Is war conceivable?)

Paris, Economica, 2003, 470 p.

Jean-Vincent Brisset

NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Michael Black

- 1 Practically all the analyses of the potential conflicts between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan are structured along the same lines: an analysis of the balance of military power and a review of the scenarios for the outbreak of hostilities. They are generally completed with an examination of the possible progress of operations and above all by an examination of the consequences and implications internationally. Sometimes the consequences of the economic interdependence of the two potential adversaries are also taken into account.
- 2 In *China and Taiwan: Is war conceivable?*, Jean-Pierre Cabestan has sought to go further, progressing from the problems of military defence to those of global defence. A China watcher for many years, he is one of the few researchers to have carried out detailed work on the Taiwanese part of the equation. The result is a reference work filled with often little-known or unpublished information, and which draws up an almost exhaustive inventory of the situation before making some predictions. It also emphasises that what is often taken to be a bilateral problem is in fact largely governed by the positions taken on the third corner of the triangle: Washington.
- 3 In Taiwan, as in the People's Republic of China, everything concerning military affairs is highly opaque. National sources are, on the Peking side, almost totally controlled. In Taipei the implacable conflict within a new democracy hardly generates any more light. External sources, essentially American, are few in number and very dependent on

various lobbies. To this must be added some complex affairs which have given birth to rumours from which it is often difficult to extricate oneself. The author has had to carry out an enormous task of cross-checking in order to avoid a number of pitfalls.

- 4 The first part of the book deals with the military equation, as seen principally from the Taiwanese side. While the first chapter is devoted to the rising power of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the next four deal with the military machine at Taipei's disposal. The analysis of the PLA's capacities goes beyond the figures usually presented—impressive as these are—and takes into account both the intentions of the leadership and the persistent deficiencies. To the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, the very existence of Taiwan is unacceptable. This does not prevent them from recognising their inability to bring about reunification by force, a shift in the balance of power in their favour being hoped for by 2010. They are therefore going to attempt, in the most authentic Chinese strategic tradition, to use all other means to succeed. The study of the Taiwanese terms poses the problem of the place and the role of the armed forces of a country whose survival is at stake. Having established the basic concepts and the strategies which flow from them, the author draws an extremely comprehensive picture of the makeup of the island's defences. The great interest of this book is that it studies the foundations as well as the present situation and the prospects for the future. A chapter devoted to equipment and budget problems is followed by a study of two much less well-known subjects, the organisation of the armed forces (as well as the links between the army and the nation), and the strategic and structural vulnerabilities of the Taiwanese armed forces.
- 5 The second part of the book is devoted to an equally exhaustive and largely innovative study of the overall defence of Taiwan, which is nothing less than a struggle for survival, in the face of an adversary who could attack at any moment. The ubiquity of the relationship between Taiwan and the United States is set out in detail, and goes deeper into the reasons for, and the implications of, the “quasi-alliance” between the two countries. The following chapters are respectively devoted to the position of the Republic of China on the international scene, where it is less isolated than often appears to be the case, as well as to its advantages and vulnerabilities. On an economic level, the links between the two Chinas and the dependence of Taipei, but also that of Peking, on the outside world, complicate matters considerably, in particular because of the permanent presence of hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese on the mainland. The island's political system is in constant evolution, and a national consensus is proving difficult to establish. Lastly, the psychological peculiarities of Taiwanese society are given an interesting exposition, in particular on the dangers of Finlandisation or of “Hongkongization”. The part of the book devoted to the People's Republic is very short, but enlightening.
- 6 The last part is entitled “The Weak against the Weak?”. Jean Pierre Cabestan provides some solid justification for this apparently incongruous question. The first chapter reviews, in a fairly classical manner, the various causes which could lead to the eruption of a conflict, or more accurately to an attack on the island by the PLA. The highly detailed and realistic analysis of the predictable scenarios—limited operations or all-out war—is preceded by two short passages which ask the questions: “Will China seek to legalise its armed act?” and “Will the Taiwanese resist?”. Lastly, the concluding chapter tackles Peking's favoured strategies. In the Chinese world, the concepts set out by Sun Zi remain pre-eminent. It would be inconceivable for China not to seek to

achieve its ends by means which would avoid a major attack, which would be militarily risky and ruinous in image terms. Thus a scenario is presented of increasing pressure, combining psychological action with strategic undermining, which seeks to obtain capitulation without a struggle, rather than victory.

- 7 The book is completed by a series of annexes containing much information, some of which, on the Taiwanese forces, is not widely known. The bibliography is extremely comprehensive.
- 8 *China and Taiwan: Is war conceivable?* is therefore essential reading for anyone who wishes to really deepen their understanding of a problem which weighs heavily on the triangular relationship between Peking, Taipei and Washington.